Check Your Tools!

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When you hear the word "tool," you automatically think of a wrench, ratchet, hammer, screwdriver, or other item indicating mechanical maintenance. You do a thorough ATAF ("all tools accounted for") at work, but have you ever stopped to look at the condition of your tools for cooking?

Pots, pans, electrical appliances, and utensils should be considered invaluable tools of daily use. Therefore, shouldn't you probably apply some minor tool-control processes to your kitchen inventory? Take a minute to look at your cabinets and drawers; you may be able to stave off disaster.

In my case, it started as an easy Saturday evening with family visiting from out of town, which called for a fancier-than-normal dinner. I started a ham cooking in the oven and put potatoes into a large aluminum pot with water to boil. After several minutes, I noticed the water still hadn't heated up, so I felt for heat at the base of the pot. "No problem there," I thought. The burner was on high, and the new electric range didn't take long to heat.

Between visiting with a cousin and trying to work around my 3-year-old, I didn't notice the pot was beginning to smoke lightly. The moment I turned my back, "it" happened—with an electrical crack that sounded like lightning, a bright blue flame shot out from the base of the pot. The fire extinguisher automatically kicked on, and all eyes fell on me.

Luckily, the flame was doused instantly, but flashes of electricity continued arcing all over my water-covered stove. I quickly secured power to the range top and oven, grabbed some cloth potholders, and swung the pot into the kitchen sink. Let me clarify here that no potatoes were harmed in the making of this mishap.

After cleaning up all the water and transferring what was left of dinner into more pots and pans, we discovered what had happened. The base of the large aluminum pot had melted on the element, causing water to soak the electrically powered coil, which then ruptured and short-circuited through the standing water. Fortunately, no one was hurt. The only damage was a gaping hole in the bottom of the pot,

a ruptured heating element, and one short-circuited range. Thankfully, we had dodged the potential for an electrocution.

The moral of this story is simple: Take care of your tools and keep an eye on them, whether you're fixing aircraft or dinner.

Resources:

- www.cpsc.gov/library/foia/foia99/idi/cookware.pdf *[Re:FOIA Request S9050019: Aluminum Cookware and Melting Incidents/File Search 1990 to Present]*
- http://www.theworkshop.net/CTVGoodMorningCanada/appliances/appliancemaint.htm *[Appliance Maintenance Tips To Help Around Your Home]*